Southeastern Idaho Extension achieves success with pesticide applicator education

The Situation
Idaho State Law requires that any individual applying restricted-use pesticides for pest control have a current Idaho State pesticide applicator license. To obtain a pesticide applicator license, individuals must pass a state-issued applicator exam with a minimum score of 70 percent. Professional applicators will need to add additional categories to their licenses by passing an exam in each category they wish to be certified for. Many farmers and professional applicators in southeastern Idaho utilize restricted-use pesticides to produce healthy, high-yielding crops. These pesticides need to be used in a safe and effective manner to prevent adverse effects to the environment, human health and the food supply. Passing an exam to obtain a license can be challenging for some individuals. Several clientele requests for assistance with obtaining a pesticide license were received in 2007. Southeastern University of Idaho Extension educators recognized the need to provide annual pesticide applicator educational programming.

Our Response
Extension educators Danielle Gunn and Dr. William H. Bohl collaborated with University of Idaho Pesticide Safety Education Program specialist, Ronda Hirnyck and Idaho State Department of Agriculture Pesticide Program Manager, Sherman Takatori, to develop and deliver a pesticide applicator educational program for southeastern Idaho. Our goal is to bring effective pesticide safety education to potential pesticide applicators in southeastern Idaho. We focus on providing individuals with the appropriate tools and knowledge to learn how to apply pesticides safely and subsequently pass the licensing exam and any additional license categories they need.

For the past four years, Fort Hall and Bingham County Extension have coordinated procurement of a classroom location, advertising, and distribution of educational study manuals. So as not to favor one location over another, the pesticide safety program rotates within the southeastern Idaho region and moves among Fort Hall, American Falls and Pocatello. The pesticide safety program consists of a one-day course discussing such topics as basics of pesticide safety, understanding labels, pesticide fate in the environment and pesticide formulations. The second day includes a review of the previous day’s topics, a question and answer session, and test administration. The program has recently included the use of “clicker” technology so presenters can ask questions and have the audience immediately respond with individually operated remote “clickers.” This technology allows a presenter to measure the participants’ knowledge and level of understanding and
determine if more time is needed before moving to the next topic.

Program Outcomes
Through these collaborative efforts, we have reached over 100 people. When we began the program, our baseline pass rate was 66%. Through improved teaching methods and materials, we have improved the pass rate to 72%. The program continues to grow as we see more participants and increased learning every year.

Four main outcomes have resulted from this program:

- Individuals are educated on basic pesticide information and pesticide safety.
- Individuals learn how pesticides affect the environment and how to reduce pesticide misuse.
- Individuals are taught and encouraged to use pesticides in a safe and prudent manner.
- An estimated 90% or more of program participants take the exam and 72% are able to acquire a state license.

The Future
UI Extension and the Idaho State Department of Agriculture will continue to offer and improve on the existing Pesticide Applicator Education Program. We have plans to expand the program to include more topics with multi-day classroom teaching and hands-on training to ensure safe and effective pesticide applications. Safe application leads to a safe food supply and a healthy environment.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors
Idaho State Department of Agriculture
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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